

FT. GIBSON
FT. GIBSON, OKLA.
Mussoque

HABS Nº 34
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OKLA,
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WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA
DISTRICT Nº 34

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDING SURVEY
LEON B. SENTER, DISTRICT OFFICER
307 PHILTOWER BLDG. TULSA, OKLA.

FORT GIBSON
Fort Gibson, Muscogee Co.
Oklahoma

Owner: Not given.

Date of Erection: 1845 (beginning).

Architect and Builder: U.S. Government.

Present Condition: Some structures good, others poor.

Number of Stories: Varies.

Materials of Construction: Stone.

Other Existing Records: See text.

Additional Data: See following pages.

FORT GIBSON

FORT GIBSON, OKLAHOMA

The site of Fort Gibson was first occupied by United States troops on April 21, 1824, when Colonel Matthew Arbuckle arrived there with Companies B. C. G. and K of the Seventh Infantry. These troops were brought there in an effort to arrest hostilities between the Osage Indians, who occupied the country, and the Cherokee and other emigrant Indians then living in Arkansas. The troops abandoned Fort Smith on March the sixth, 1824 and descended the Arkansas River to the Grand River where they established a post under the name of Cantonment Gibson named for Colonel George Gibson, Commissary-general of Subsistence.

The soldiers at once began the erection of temporary quarters while they engaged in cutting out the heavy timber and undergrowth to make room for a military establishment. They then proceeded to the erection of log houses and in time constructed a military post surrounding a square. When completed the fort was one hundred and fifty yards from the river bank and seven hundred and twenty six yards from the summit of the hill northeast of it; it was on a slight

eminence about eighteen feet above the river bank. It measured on the south side from north to south three hundred and eighteen feet and from east to west three hundred and forty-eight feet. The north and east sides were enclosed by pickets or a palisade and the lines of the south and west sides were rows also of log houses all of which were provided with galleries along the front ten feet wide. The fort measured on the inside clear of the galleries, two hundred and forty-seven feet from north to south and two hundred seventy-seven feet from east to west. The buildings were all one story except those of two stories on the east side, which were principally occupied by the officers. At the southwest and northeast angles of the work large block houses were constructed and two six pounder cannons placed in the lower story of each of them.

The location of the Cantonment Gibson was unhealthful and resulted in an appalling death rate of the troops stationed there.

The houses occupied by the soldiers were built of green logs that soon rotted and required constant repairs and occasioned much sickness. Efforts were constantly made to secure the construction of stone buildings but with no success for twenty years after the log fort was begun.

During this period Fort Gibson was regarded as the most important of the forts on the western frontier which included Fort Jesup, Fort Towson, Fort Gibson, Fort Leavenworth and Fort Snelling, and at times there were as many troops stationed

at Fort Gibson as in all the other forts combined. During this period Fort Gibson played a prominent part in pacifying savage Indians and making it possible for the government to remove to this country the immigrant Indians from east of the Mississippi River. Several notable expeditions departed from Fort Gibson for the purpose of making peace with wild Indians on the prairies as a result of which numerous peace treaties were negotiated at Fort Gibson and other points accessible from the Fort. The best known of these expeditions was that of 1834, when a large number of men departed under command of General Henry Leavenworth and Colonel Henry Dodge to endeavor to bring representatives of some of the wild tribes to Fort Gibson for a peace talk. Before they reached their destination General Leavenworth died near the Washita River and nearly one hundred and fifty soldiers died during the expedition, and on their return, as a result of it.

Finally after the necessary appropriation, the orders were given and on July 17, 1845, General Thomas S. Jesup, Quartermaster-general of the Army, arrived at the fort and plans were made for new buildings to be constructed of stone on the hill and the slope between it and the old fort. Work was soon under way, and by March 1846 a barrack for two companies had progressed above the second story and timbers for both floors and piazzas were laid. At this point the work was stopped by burning of the saw mill of the fort with the

loss of mill, lumber and tools. In 1855 only the commissary store house had been completed. The walls of the partially constructed barracke stood for more than ten years and still marked the unfinished plans of the army when the post was abandoned.

The order to abandon the fort was issued June 8, 1857 and within the month was substantially executed. The fort and the reservation were turned over to the Cherokee Nation and the Cherokee Council on November 6, 1857, passed an act creating the town of Kee-too-wah upon what had been the military reservation and providing for the sale to Cherokee citizens of lots therein.

The Civil War brought further changes in the fort and on April 5, 1863 the whole hill was reoccupied by three Cherokee regiments, four companies of Kansas Cavalry and Hopkins Battery of Volunteers, an aggregate of three thousand one hundred fifty men with four field pieces and two Mansfield Howitzers. A main work was constructed and embracing fifteen to seventeen acres with angles and facings; from this extended a line of earth works about one and one-quarter miles in length, the whole distance being regarded strong enough to resist a force of twenty thousand men. To this work was first given the name Fort Blunt in compliment to Major-general James G. Blunt, then commanding the district of the frontier.

After the Battle of Honey Springs July 16, 1863 the strength of the post was increased, until July 31 it aggregated

five thousand two hundred and four, and on August 31 there were six thousand fourteen troops at the garrison with eighteen field pieces. Being the most important fortified point in the territory, it served as a headquarters of military operations in that vicinity during the remainder of the Civil War and played a conspicuous part in strengthening the hands of the loyal element among the tribes. The name of Blunt was officially attached to the post until December 31, 1863 when it was dropped in favor of Fort Gibson.

A detachment of regular troops from the First Battalion of the Tenth United States Infantry in command of Major-general M. Mulligan on February 17, 1866 relieved the sixty-second Illinois Volunteers then constituting the garrison. The post remained garrisoned under the name of Fort Gibson until September 30, 1871 when it was broken up as a military post, but was temporarily occupied by the quartermaster's department as a depot for such transportation and other facilities as were necessary to enable pay-masters and other officers to communicate with Fort Sill. It was reoccupied in July 1872 by two companies of the Tenth Cavalry under Colonel Benjamin H. Grierson who were sent here to cope with the lawless element attracted by the movement of the railroad camps engaged in building the Missouri, Kansas & Texas Railroad from the Kansas line to the Red River; this command continued at Fort Gibson until 1889.

(Grant Foreman, Pioneer Days in the Early Southwest (Cleveland, 1926) ibid., Indians and Pioneers, (New Haven, 1930); ibid., Advancing the Frontier (Norman, 1933).

In the early part of the Civil War Fort Gibson and other army posts in Indian Territory were abandoned by the Union troops and occupied by the Confederates until it was reoccupied in 1863 by the Federal troops. The reservation originally contained eight square miles and four hundred and twenty-one acres and was declared a military reservation by orders dated January 25, 1870, by virtue of treaties with the Cherokee Indians on February 14, 1833, December 29, 1835 and July 19, 1866. (Report of Adjutant General, January 18, 1889.)

When they finally abandoned it, the post contained a large number of substantial structures reminiscent of the busy career and military service as a post. It was a matter of great regret that, when plans were made for the sale of town lots and allotment of lands within the Cherokee Nation, no provision was made by the Federal Government for preserving these buildings and the site of the post. However, there were then a number of these buildings in a good state of preservation that might have been saved. When the post was abandoned every thing possible was sold to the citizens round about including army wagons, mules, saws, benches, tables, blankets and even lamp posts which were constructed with coal oil lamps in tall glass enclosures mounted on solid posts.

The merchants of Fort Gibson bought and set them up along the streets in front of their places of business that began at the river and extended up past the store buildings.

In 1894 the great Cherokee payment was held in the garrison. All of the parade ground was laid off into streets and the area between became a tented city. It was here at this time the first graphophone* was brought to Fort Gibson, the owner charging each person ten or fifteen cents to listen in the ear phones to one record. All kinds of business on wheels came into the Cherokee encampment, travelling dentists, slap stick artists, shows and merry-go-rounds. (From clipping furnished by Miss Bess Howard of Fort Gibson.)

In 1933 the old well in the center of what had been the log stockade of the old fort was restored by the Old Fort Club, an organization of Fort Gibson women, and a tablet was set inside of the newly constructed curb identifying the well.

Several little cemeteries around the old fort received a large number of soldiers that died here in the early days. After years of rains the bones of these soldiers were washed out and exposed. One rain unearthed two leg bones that protruded from the ground with heavy army shoes still on the feet. (Information by Mrs. C. B. Kagy). Bones of many of the soldiers buried here were removed to the United States

*Gramophone(?).

National Cemetery about two miles east of Fort Gibson
established after the Civil War.

Historical Data furnished and/or edited by : Grant Foreman
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Signed Grant Foreman

Approved [Signature]
DISTRICT OFFICER